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ABSTRACT

This essay addresses the issue of the theory of the structure of class and education. The authors, who label themselves "activists in education," perceived a dichotomy in the understanding and practice of those with whom they work. Education studies reproduce this dichotomy, and people working in the field of education have a variety of ways of constituting what is termed here as a "gap" in understanding of the social world. The work of three people--Derek Toomey, Bob Connell, Don Edgar--is examined to understand the progress they have made and the obstacles they have met in understanding a "continuous" social reality. Four principles are offered in summary as a guide for the process of understanding a "continuous" social variety. First, social reality is essentially relational; there is no "gap." Second, a continuous reality is constituted by production and reproduction which is nothing but the interactions of people in and through their material world. Third, that production and reproduction is fundamentally and pervasively ordered by the capitalist mode of production. Fourth, in attaching the term "capitalist" to the relations of production, the marxist schema attributes meanings to the concept of "class" which are quite distinct from those of bourgeois social science, notably in the insistence on the constitutive and generative character of contradictions and conflict throughout social life and experience. Finally, the primary test of sound social theory is its ability to direct the political action. (MM)

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CLASS ANALYSIS CONFERENCE

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SOCIETY AND EXPERIENCE
with particular reference to
CLASS AND EDUCATION

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This is a rough draft. We are going to go on working on it; we are happy for this material to be copied/quoted/represented/used for any good purpose - anything but ignored. We'd like to hear about criticisms, suggestions, etc. (Politics Department, Adelaide University, North Terrace, Adelaide. 5000). Usual rules to apply. All correspondence will be entered into and no-one's decision will be final.

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As activists in education we have often encountered a curious dichotomy in the understanding and practice of those we work with. Some people are sensitive to the feelings, perceptions and predicaments of school life, and apparently find the key to understanding these in the internal logic of the realm of experience. They have only the dimmest awareness of the larger bureaucratic and political structures, or their connections with economic life, and usually choose to regard them as irrelevant or intractable. This mode of understanding and the political focus and methodology which accompanies it was especially strong in the recent past, but if the radical teachers conference held here a couple of months ago is any guide, it's losing ground to a horse of a different colour. This second group sees the school as being a mere emanation from or instrument of larger forces, and thinks of day-to-day events - if they think of them at all - as either straightforward examples of the operations of the giant machine, or as somehow detached from the workings of History.

Education studies reproduce this dichotomy. People working in the area have a variety of ways of constituting what we have termed a "gap" in our understanding of the social world. Sometimes workers in one field choose simply to ignore the work of those outside it (ed. psych. is good at this). More common now is the trick of turning the terrain covered by the other camp into a mere "context"; or to opt for eclecticism, drawing on the findings of both sides without regard to the consistency let alone unity of the understandings thus generated ("interdisciplinary studies"). We also find an imperialist approach - talking about the other side's terrain, but in your own terms. Finally, there are two versions of the "link" approach. The first connects two previously distant forces/phenomena by introducing a third (all those arrows in systems theory diagrams), while the second posits a mysterious process of osmosis to explain the influence of one phenomena upon another as a result of contiguity.

What these various intellectual strategies have in common is a more or less conscious assumption that the world is in fact made up of two great domains - society and experience, structure and the individual - or that it can properly be analysed as though it were. Education studies show the dichotomy more clearly than most, perhaps because "education" includes events ranging from the most "macro" and social to the most "micro" and experiential.

Take, for example, the problem of understanding the connections between education and social class. This question - "probably the most comprehensively surveyed social aspect of education ..."[(1)] - has been closely tied to the changing grounds chosen by the priveleged in defence of their interests. In the U.K., for example, the Norwood Committee's discovery in 1943 that children's minds fell into three broad types, and needed broader or narrower education accordingly, was succeeded by a debate centering on psychological testing. In the wake of the Butler reforms in 1944 - claiming to establish equality of educational provision - the egalitarians concentrated on showing by detailed demographic studies that access to more and better education still depended on parents' social position. This latter line of work dominated educational sociology until five or ten years ago. The current wave employs the sociology of knowledge to discover hidden social assumptions buried in the structure of school curricula, and the social ramifications of teaching such curricula. Taken together the demographic data yielded by the positivist approach and the interactionist perspective of the "new sociology" make a valuable contribution to the understanding of inequality. But the debate remains firmly within bourgeois confines.

In the different Australian circumstances the debate on inequality has taken a different and rather spasmodic form. But it has recently flared up and attracted our attention as an example of what we've called "the gap". We will use this debate as a way of getting to grips with the theoretical and political problems involved. We will be looking at the work of three people - Toomey, Connell and Edgar - and concentrating on the progress they have made and the obstacles they have met in understanding a continuous social reality. We will conclude with a few brief observations on political and theoretical implications.

* * * * * *

The debate began with Derek Toomey as the protagonist for the mainstream, Connell for the insurgents. In early work Toomey adhered to something like a conventional "working-class sub-culture" thesis, stressing the correlation between SES and the values and attitudes of parents (on the one hand) and between these values and attitudes and the educational success of children (on the other). He has lately made two important modifications to his argument. First he has emphasised the "life-style of the family" as an "independent" influence - independent, that is of SES. Second, he has tried to isolate the "<u>relative</u> importance of the school influence... and

the home influence"[2]. "I hope that this analysis (he says in his latest contribution to the debate) will suggest considerable 'room for manouvre' on the part of policy-makers..."[3]. He is concerned with "the possibility of going some way to equalising opportunities for educational and occupational attainment, albiet within a system based on inequality"[4].

Toomey's work and the tradition it embodies came under sharp criticism in a long chapter "Class structure and personal socialisation" published by Bob Connell in 1972. Connell developed quite a new line of attack, but began it on the home ground of the mainstream: the notion that the origins of children's academic performance lay in the values and attitudes prevailing in the home. Connell began by shrewdly separating adults' expectations from their values and attitudes, arguing that the former were merely observations about existing reality rather than influences on it.[5] We will return to this distinction and concentrate for the moment on Connell's treatment of values and attitudes. He argued that adults' values and attitudes would influence the education achievements of their children, but that there were no class-based differences in them to account for the massive and massively-documented patterns of educational inequality.

This posed two questions: first, if values and attitudes didn't do it, what did? Second, what explains the uniformity of values and attitudes? Connell's answer to the first is speculative: he entertains five candidates (ranging from heredity to differences in material circumstances) and concludes that "Some seem to be plausible, some do not ... it seems likely that they interact and influence each other, and that their effects cumulate ..."[6].

His answer to the second question - what accounts for the uniformity of values and attitudes - will be found, he says, not in the myth of the classless society but, on the contrary, in recognising the success of one class in dominating another - in this case by controlling the manufacture and distribution of ideas. Children are "socialized" not into classes, but into class society. The Australian ruling class has achieved a near-perfect ideological hegemony, and thus was able to reproduce the class structure virtually without anyone noticing.

It was Connell's work which attracted our attention, not least because it seemed to us to pose the problem of "bridging the gap" in a sharp form. In part this was a consequence of his achievement; his chapter put the problem of understanding individual experience into a broad social and historical context; in particular, it attended not just to the placement of individuals in the class structure, but to the reproduction of that structure. But there were also problems with Connell's explanation which seemed to be intimately connected with "the gap" as it appeared in education studies and in the social sciences in general.

Perhaps we can best develop our critique of Connell's position by starting at the same point as he did in attacking the dominant school - at the level of empirical evidence.

You will recall that Connell insisted on the primacy of class analysis, but then assumed that because the surveys showed no significant class-patterning of values and attitudes, that there weren't any. This conclusion is then used to reject "working-class sub-culture" explanations of unequal educational outcomes. Contrary to this method, we would rather retain the class perspective and question the evidence.

A debate about whether the working-class did or did not have distinctive values and attitudes was conducted in the US in the '60's by Merton and Hyman. It was resolved by Rodman's notion of "value-stretch". In England, Frank Parkin posited the same kind of notion, suggesting that a large sector of the working-class has a propensity to "negotiate" for themselves a modified version of the dominant value-system. Both Rodman and Parkin suggested the possibility that situational determinants operate on the choice of values made by working-class individuals and groups. Some determinants might be long-term (e.g. the structural situation of an individual's work-group; the family's class-history); and some might be short-term (who is evoking the response or asking the question? Where is the questioning going on? What form does the question take? and so on).

We would be very surprised if something very like this was not going on when white-collar interviewers inspect working-class values and attitudes. If so, it would suggest that the evidence which Connell cites doesn't mean what it says. Our suspicions harden into conviction when we examine Connell's use of the term "hegemony".

It will be remembered that he explained the absence of significant class-based differences in values and attitudes as being a result of bourgeois hegemony. He seems to say that working-class culture or consciousness is obliterated and is replaced by the dominant culture or value-system. This is certainly not the sense which Gramsci attached to the term, nor is it consistent with historical materialism. Rather, as Gramsci put it, there is a "contrast between thought and action, i.e. the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed in affective action...". This "contrast between thought and action", he argued, "cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order...". Gramsci speaks of the subordinate group as having "its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally, and in flashes..." even while verbally it affirms a conception not its own but adopted "for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination".(7)

In this light the operation of a bourgeois hegemony is best understood as a fragmentation and disorganisation of the culture and consciousness of the culture and consciousness of the subordinate class - not its obliteration. Working-class culture may be denied wider articulation, made to seem partial and inadequate, and publicly labelled as inferior. But it is not made to disappear and cannot be until the conditions which give rise to it themselves disappear. The contradictions between the dominant and the fragmented subordinate culture remain, always present in informal groups and working-class institutions and individuals. Rodman's and Parkin's work give us some guides to the "patterns of management" evolved by and in the subordinate class in their efforts to cope.

Of course we raise here the question of the relations between structure and ideology, and the nature of both. We will leave this as theoretical question to one side for the moment, and instead point out that much of the relationship between structure and ideology may be understood if we think of them as intersecting and interacting in the individual. And this brings us to our third criticism of Connell's argument.

We recall his distinction between "expectations" (on the one hand) and "values and attitudes" (on the other), and note the implicit assumption that differences in the one didn't bear on the other, or on behaviour. Is this likely? Are people's values, attitudes and expectations kept in compartments, or do they rather act on each other and on the whole of personal organization?

Now let us recall an implication of Connell's use of the term "hegemony" - that one group of people can fill up another group of people with this or that set of ideas or dispositions. We have here a conception of the ingestion of culture and of the formation of people which depicts "the person" as a passive aggregate of more-or-less discrete attributes which exist at a rather shallow, accessible and cognitive level, and largely independent of situation. Against this we conceive of the person as a self-constructing, organic, not-so-divisible entity which exists in part at semi- or sub-conscious levels, and which performs in different ways in response to different situations.

This conception is, we think, assumed in Gramsci's understanding of the operation of ideological hegemony. It would lead us to think of the contradictions between the dominant and the fragmented subordinate culture as a central substance of personal experience, issuing perhaps in discrete personal characteristics (the having, or lack of, "self-esteem"/"sense of competence" etc), but more likely suffusing the individual's thought and action. It is of the essence of Gramsci's conception that these tensions and contradictions do not exist in or arise out of an abstract war of ideas, but embody the tensions and contradictions of social life. Here we return to the question of the structure of social life, and its relationship to consciousness and culture.

Connell's position in the "inequality debate" is distinguished, as we have already noted, by its attention not only to the whole structure of society, but by its insistence on class as a concept which reflects the foundations of that structure. Yet his argument grows out of a discussion which does not rely on that concept, but rather on SES. In this he is at one with almost every other writer on the problem, and with them he pays the price.

It remains to point out one of the most basic deficiencies common to all participants in the debate we've been reviewing, and most pertinent to the concerns of this conference. While most of the writers on educational inequality write about "class" they actually use as their measure some variant of SES.

The theoretical differences between a marxism concept of class and social stratification variables like SES are as great as the political gulf which separates their respective proponents. Whereas for Marx the criteria of class position were opposite attributes and opposing interests, for the social stratificationists the criterion of class position is the individual's relative share of the same attribute. As Balbus points out, classifications based on this gradation concept of class are thus undertaken with a view to describing a given society along a particular dimension, not with a view to discerning in-built structural conflicts and contradictory interests. That is, the stratificationists tot up and variously arrange the symptoms of inequality, they do not go all out to uncover what generates it. From a political standpoint, it is clear that a view of class which encourages us to believe that we can move into a higher class by taking a night-school diploma, upping our stock of consumer durables, or shifting to a better neighbourhood will also encourage at best a reformist politics. Finally, and important for our case as it is to unfold, the stratificationists take the individual as consumer rather than as producer. SES or other such constructs can in no way be treated as equivalent of, or rough approximations to, a concept of class as understood by marxists.

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Of course, the marxist concept of class is not without its problems either. While wrestling with some of these, a week ago today, we came across Don Edgar's Social Class and the Structure of Education, published by the La Trobe Sociology Dept. six months ago. It was immediately apparent that Edgar had avoided the worst pitfalls which come from confusing SES and class, and that this had enabled him to make some significant advances.

Edgar proceeds in this fashion. Modern capitalism at once produces the free labourer and requires an ever-increasing number of ever-more complex and sharply differentiated skills. This complex differentiation of the work-force blurs the old class divisions, so that competition between groups within the large and growing salary and wage-earning class looms largest in most people's understanding of society. This submersion of inter-class antagonism is furthered by a fair degree of social mobility, which serves to prevent the growth of class culture and stable class idenfiications.

Social ranking depends upon access to the better-rewarded skills. Competition for these is unequal. This competition is unequal because the individual's access to them is influenced by his/her father's position in the division of labour. What is it about the father's position that counts? Not its status, prestige, or even, in any simple way, its income, but the characteristics of the work he performs. Which characteristics? Three: the type of skill; the place in the authority structure; membership of consumption or distributive groupings.

Relying on replications of work done in the U.S. by Kohn and Schooler, Edgar shows that there are significant correlations between various attitudes and values of workers, and the character of their work. Workers whose jobs rank "well" on the three measures Edgar employs are more likely to develop what he calls a sense of competence, and this is likely to pass to their kids, who, thus armed, do better at school than they otherwise would.

Edgar has made several useful contributions. He turns our attention away from the realm of the private sphere (life-style/values and attitudes/etc.) and from externalities (status, prestige/etc.), and directs it instead to the sphere of production and, even more importantly not merely to its static shadow - "occupation" - but to the social relations of work. Moreover, Edgar is attempting to bridge "the gap" we referred to earlier, to see the generative mechanisms which would show how the apparent "gap" dissolves into a series of concrete inter-connected events.

But on closer examination we find some important problems with Edgar's analysis and it is to these we now turn. The one shortcoming which seems to us to lie at the root of all others is Edgar's failure to understand the power and scope of capital. We say this despite his willingness to refer to Australia as "capitalist", to note (albeit in passing) "the basic economic class differences between those who own the means of production and those who do not," and to make similar brief remarks with a marxian flavour.(8) These are, for Edgar, in the nature of ritual observances; they form no part of his theoretical foundation.

The social model upon which Edgar actually premises his analysis is hard to characterize briefly, because it is in no sense a structural totality. Rather, it is an infinite and characterless space upon which play disparate forces such as technology, social classes, skills, ideologies, property systems, and so forth; capitalism, when it appears, is merely one large force among several.

By contrast, the marxist point of view, which we are urging here, sees capital, understood as a specific pattern of social relationships with its own internal logic, as the basic structuring force in the capitalist formation.

If we are right, Edgar's inadequate grasp of the ramifications of the concept of capitalism leads him at several places into error, or at least onto dubious ground, when he is discussing the contemporary class structure. Implicitly supposing Marx's to be a two-class theory, and certain that such simplicity could not comprehend the growth of what he calls "the property-less middle class" and what he sees as the variety of groupings around him, Edgar turns to Weber for an account of these developments. Thus guided he proposes to rank people according chiefly to the marketability of the skills they possess.

Our criticisms - and they can be no more than assertions here - are two. First, the often-made point about the growth of the property-less middle-class certainly betrays a shallow understanding of capitalism to suppose that the expansion of the wage- and salary-earning sectors indicates a diminution of the social power of capital. What might be more easily shown is the concentration of capital and the expansion of the capitalist mode of production to embrace productive sectors and elements of the work-force previously outside it. If one's gaze is confined to the ownership of property as the basis of the individual's socio-economic power, one necessarily misses the growth of the power and reach of capital as a structural force.

Second, Edgar is wrong to suppose that the marxian perspective cannot accommodate divisions within the proletariat. It is true that this problem has been neglected for a long time, but very interesting work has been done in recent years by writers such as Andre Gorz, Theotonio Dos Santos, Al Szymanski, Francesca Freedman, Howard Watchel, and others.[9] These writers, unlike Edgar, have situated the divisions among the proletariat within the logic of the capitalist mode of production, rather than seeing them as breaches of that logic and necessarily founded outside it. An illustration: Edgar is on strongly contested ground when he suggests that the increasingly complex divisions of labour is brought into being by the needs of technology - which latter he seems to regard as an independant supra-human force. The writers we referred to a few lines ago stress the view put here by Freedman in her article "The Internal Structure of the American Proletariat":

> On the one hand, the expansion of capital necessitates divisions within the working population, corresponding to the creation of new use-value functions for labor. On the other hand, this labor is unified under the wage-relation. Based as it is on antagonistic relations between classes, capitalism develops an ideology that is authoritarian and hierarchical in nature. It responds to the objective unity of the working class by reproducing authoritarian and hierarchical relationships within that class, utilizing them to divide it on a social and subjective basis.(10)

This line is developed in various ways, but it has the merit of avoiding the reification of technology, of capturing one of the most important but least noticed (and therefore least questioned) means by which a social order is reproduced, and thus reminding us that a system of productio , according to Marx:

> must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part.(11)

Next - concerning mobility; and again we must start from Edgar's understanding of the nature of capitalism. According to him "it won't do to say simply that economic classes ... exist in the structure of capitalism because that is tautological and unilluminating.(12) "The real question is whether these 'exploited workers of the system' recognize (a) that they are different, have a common style of life, similar attitudes and beliefs ... and (b) ... that other classes with different attitudes and beliefs exist..." (13)

Refusing to see that class division is integral to capitalism, Edgar proceeds to reduce the existence of classes to the question of class consciousness. As the two were the same! As if social phenomena can not exercise an influence on other developments unless these individuals involved are directly aware of them.

Since mobility impairs the formation of stable class identifications according to Edgar, it would seem to follow that it actually tends to weaken the class structure. If we have read Edgar correctly on this, he has inadvertantly taken a big backward step. Council's first chapter, discussed earlier, makes the distinction between class places and class agents; and it should be clear to anyone that a degree of social mobility is an integral part of class structure, not a solvent of it.

Several of the previous points seem to call for another one - our last in this vein; a word or two about what we'll call Edgar's rather naive empiricism. We saw something of that quality in the quotations reproduced just above. We suspect, but cannot argue here, that this stems from or is associated with a rather simplistic notion of structure. Marx once complained to Engels that "... the philistine's and vulgar economist's way of looking at things stems ... from the fact that it is only the direct form of manifestation or relations that is reflected in their brains and not their inner connection".(14)

"Thus, for Marx, ... (writes M. Godolier) ... 'structures' should not be confused with visible social relations but constitute a level of reality invisible but present behind the visible social relations. The logic of the latter ... depend upon the functioning of the hidden structures ..."(15)

We have concentrated to this point on problems in Edgar's analysis of the nature of class society. But there may also be problems with the way in which he conceives of its embodiment in people.

The approach taken to educational inequality in Social Class Differences and the Structure of Education requires an understanding of a series of relationships; father's work experience to father's character/outlook to child to child's academic performance. Edgar's account of these relationships is sketchy to say the least. On the whole he relies on correlations between certain aspects of certain of his key variables. This is not necessarily illegitimate. As Edgar himself points out, it's early days yet for the analysis of the real processes. In the meantime he suggests the complexion of the relationships by introducing the twin concepts of "competence" and "sense of competence"; these are meant to draw on the inter-actionist perspective he has elaborated elsewhere. In the context of this discussion - about the problem of creating a unified theory to match a continuous social reality - this part of the whole treatment is crucial, obviously.

We cannot pursue it here but merely record our opinion that the conception of the production of people and culture implied in Edgar's use of the terms "competence" and "sense of competence" is very like that in Connell's analysis. In particular, these concepts often seem to refer to attributes which express themselves in a way which is quite independent of the experience or practice in question. Worse, to summarize the consequences of life in class society in terms of having/not having or having more/less of "a sense of competence" scarcely does justice to that experience. Not just because there is more that could be said; but because, we suspect, people are not organized in that way. We again say that "... the contradictions between the dominant and subordinate culture remain always present in ... individuals". The absence of tension and contradiction in Edgar's account of experience is consistent with, and perhaps a consequence of, his blindness to the turbulence and contradiction of capitalist society. Rather than Edgar's idea of more/less competence, we'd turn for assistance to Sennett and Cobb's concept of "the hidden injuries of class".(16)

It seems likely that the difficulties Edgar has encountered are of just the kind we mentioned at the outset. In moving to analyse the structure of class and education he has so far been unable to carry with him the insights and concepts of his inter-actionist perspectives.

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Trying to draw together the threads and implications of an argument which has been made largely by indirection makes us acutely aware of the difficulties that Toomey, Connell and Edgar have faced, and of the primitive stage of development of our thesis. There are some obvious methodological implications - work needs to be done in the sphere of production; it should never isolate "factors" for examination; there should be a new emphasis on anthropological observation and on interviewing of a very self-conscious and exhaustive kind, and so on.

But another implication of our argument is that the methodology/theory distinction must be collapsed. We may be permitted the cliche "Don't take problems - make them". Clearly the evidence does not speak for itself; the process of its construction is of the essence. We suggest four summary principles to guide that process. First, social reality is <u>essentially</u> relational. As Raymond Williams put it, (in relation to art):

> as we discover the nature of the relation between an individual project and a collective mode, we find that we are analysing, as two forms of the same process, both its active composition and its conditions of composition, and in either direction this is a complex of extending relationships.(17)

There is no "gap". Second, a continuous reality is constituted by production and reproduction which is nothing but the interactions of people in and through their material world. Third, that production and reproduction is fundamentally and pervasively ordered by the capitalist mode of production. Fourth, in attaching the term 'capitalist' to the relations of production, the marxist shema attributes meanings to the concept 'class' which are quite distinct from those of bourgeois social science, most notably in the insistence on the constitutive and generative character of contradictions and conflict throughout social life and individual experience.

Finally, the primary test of social theory is its ability to direct political action. We think that these three writers have analyses which commit them to false and crippling dichotomies: work inside the system or out; reform or revolution; personal liberation or social emancipation. Just as there is no gap, there are no dichotomies.

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NOTES

1. F.J. Hunt (ed.) Socialization in Australia. Melbourne, 1972. p. 42
2. Derek Toomey "Educational disadvantage and meritocratic schooling: La Trobe (Mimeo) 1976. p.1
3. Ibid p. 2
4. Ibid p. 1
5. R.W. Connell "Class Structure and Personal Socialization in F.J. Hunt, op cit. p. 52
6. Ibid p. 53
7. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowall-Smith (eds.) Selections from the Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. London, 1971, p. 327.
8. Donald E. Edgar. Social class differences and the structure of education La Trobe Sociology Paper No. 34. March, 1976. p.9

NOTES (Cont.)

9. Andre Gorz. "The tyranny of the factory" Telos 16, Summer, 1973; and "Their factories and our people" Telos 18, Winter 1973-74. Theotonio Dos Santos "The Concept of Social Classes:, Science and Society, vol. 34, no. 2 (Summer 1970); Albert Szymanski "Trends in the American Working Class:, Socialist Revolution Francesca Freedman "The Internal Structure of the American Proletariat: a Marxist Analysis": Socialist Revolution 26 (Oct. - Dec, 1975); Howard Watchel, "Class Consciousness and Stratification in the Labor Process in URPE Bulletin.

10. Francesca Freedman, op cit. p. 45

11. ~~Capital. Vol. 3~~ German Ideology

12. Edgar, op cit. p. 9

13. Ibid. p. 10

14. Quoted by Norman Geras in"Marx and the Critique of Political Economy", in Robin Blackburn (ed.) Ideology in Social Science, London, 1972, p. 284.

15. Maurice Godolier "Structure and Contradiction in Capital", in Ibid, p. 336.

16. Richard Sennett & Jonathan Cobb The Hidden Injuries of Class. New York, 1973.

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